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Femoroacetabular Impingement (FAI)

Over the past decade an understanding of Femoroacetabular Impingement (FAI) has increased exponentially. FAI refers to a condition where there is a bony abnormality of the hip. This may be on either the femoral side (ball), the acetabular side (socket), or both.

When involving the femoral side, this condition is termed Cam impingement and is the result of an abnormally shaped femoral head being forced into the socket. Since the head is not round, as it should be normally, this causes damage to the articular cartilage and the labrum through a “cam” type mechanism with an effect similar to the cam devices used in manufacturing and engines.

When the pathology involves the acetabular side it is called Pincer impingement and refers to an acetabulum that is too deep, extends beyond the normal boundaries, or is malrotated. This creates a situation of over coverage and causes the labrum to be trapped between the femoral head and neck with motion of the hip. Over time the labrum will tear and the underlying articular cartilage will be damaged.

The majority of patients with FAI are thought to have a mixed type, with components of both Cam and Pincer impingement. The etiology of the condition remains unknown but is likely a combination of factors including genetic, developmental, and overuse.